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Atari Online News, Etc.
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Dana P. Jacobson, Publisher/Managing Editor
Joseph Mirando, Managing Editor
Rob Mahlert, Associate Editor

Atari Online News, Etc. Staff

Dana P. Jacobson -- Editor
Joe Mirando -- "People Are Talking"
Michael Burkley -- "Unabashed Atariophile"
Albert Dayes -- "CC: Classic Chips"
Rob Mahlert -- Web site
Thomas J. Andrews -- "Keeper of the Flame"

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-* Tomato Garden Pirates Jailed *-
-* Apple: Psystar Destroyed Evidence! *-
-* Microsoft Files To Stay Word Injunction! *-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard
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"Saying it like it is!"

Well, we're currently in a thunderstorm and tornado watch here in the Northeast - "typical" New England weather for this time of the year. I don't mind the t-storms, because they're quite prevalent this time of the year, but tornadoes? Ugh! We'll see what happens.

I had a call late last night from one of my college classmates. I was at work so I returned his call late in the evening. Apparently another one of our classmates had died suddenly - collapsed in his driveway. We don't know what happened, but it came as a shock to us - we're all under 60 and in good health, or so we thought.

Anyway, this guy was among a small group of us who worked on the college radio station, back when it was a station operating via cable. We helped turn the station around and helped to get everything progressing in order to turn into an FM station. Most everything was finalized shortly after we graduated, and the new status became a reality. Another great memory from this guy was he did a radio marathon, staying awake and broadcasting for as long as he could. If I remember, he stayed awake for 30-something hours. The following year, another guy and I decided to do the same thing, as a pair, and "beat" the first year's marathon. We did that, and then some. I even had to take a mid-term exam while I was on the air, or risk failing that course! Anyway, we had a lot of fun during those years of college radio. We were all journalism and public relations majors, but we "minored" in radio and television. We all went our different ways after graduation, and occasionally getting in touch every few years to keep in contact. And now this.

A brush of nostalgia? Perhaps. But, these kinds of things happen to us all the time. Heck, look at our Atari relationships. Best pals for how many years? Atari died, but we're still there maintaining some sort of an attachment to the various Atari accoutrements that we've adopted over the years. Time moves on, and we continue to go our separate ways. That's just a fact of life, and we have little to no choice in the matter. But, there's nothing wrong with fondly having a bit of nostalgia, and remembering the good times.

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Another week has come and gone and still the messages in the NewsGroup are few and far between. I'm not going to even pretend that I know when/if things are going to pick up but, as I said last week, AT&T dropping UseNet access is not a good sign. It's hard enough for those of us who prefer 'the old ways' as it is. Having your ISP just drop access to one of the 'pillars' of the original internet just really sucks. I'm sorry, but I gotta call 'em as I see 'em. I know that UseNet isn't really popular (percentage-wise) anymore, but c'mon, it's such a 'basic'.

On another note (yeah, you just KNEW there was going to be another note, right?), I see some troubling things happening out there in the world of politics these days. I mean, we've got a minority party throwing its weight around and crying that they're not being represented when, just three short years ago they were the majority party and 'keeping the minority down'. The minority party, at the time, railed against the big bad bullies. Now, they are the majority and still letting the bullies run wild. It's time to bust some heads (in a figurative way, of course) and say, "Look, you guys lost the majority. You don't have the weight to throw around anymore. Now isn't there an airport bathroom you should be hanging around in or a prostitute you should be paying?"

They can, of course, argue and complain, and that's part of what makes our system work; the ability to have a voice even if you aren't in the majority. Having a voice, however, does not mean you can bully and push your attitudes and opinions on everyone else. If the minority wants to filibuster, good for them. Let them. But they're going to have to actually DO it, not just bluster and blow about it. Then, after they've made all the noise they want, they can go back to their home states or district and explain to their voters why they voted against this or that.

Another thing that bothers me is these 'grass roots' protests. These are nothing of the kind. They are coordinated efforts by special interests, ie: insurance companies, and medical concerns. Heck, some of their employees even went to these rallies wearing company logos.

And, to tell you the truth, I wouldn't even mind if the companies had a say. But to 'sneak in' and represent yourself as 'regular people' is just wrong. And on top of all that, they now want us to guarantee that they make a profit of 35 cents on the dollar... in addition to raising our rates another 30% this year.

The upshot of all of this is that they get people who are in genuine need to vote against their own interests. It's all for the shareholders. Remember the tune, "What's Good For General Bullmoose Is Good For The USA"? That's what we're facing now, but in a much more insidious way.

And all this misinformation about "Death Panels" and taking away choice. No one wants to kill your auntie. Okay, maybe your uncle thinks about it every once in a while, but that's different. And that's not what the measure says anyway, and they damned-well know it. Heck, Chuckie Grassley presented a measure last term with almost the exact same wording, and he's one of the little twerps screwing with what they're trying to do now.

And the majority leadership is sitting there on their hands, doing little more than protecting themselves from being investigated. I STILL say that we should offer Tom "The Hammer" Delay as much money as it takes to get him to shill for the good guys for once instead of his special interest friends. His moral standards have always been flexible, and he's not above doing something just for money.

Oh, that reminds me, in addition to last week's shout-out to the president for reading this column, I want to add another shout-out to the producers of Dancing With The Stars, who announced just after last week's column that they would have Tom Delay as one of their celebrities. You would have made out better with MY plan, Tom.

And last of all, I want to mention some of these people showing up at the "town hall" meetings that the President has been speaking at. Who's idea was it to start showing up at these things with GUNS? Do you mean to tell me that a dozen or so people all decided to show up at a meeting where the President was going to be speaking about health care with guns? I don't care if you've got a permit or not... we're talking about the President. And the fact that so many of these humps thought of it all at once, all by themselves is... inconceivable. I MIGHT be able to understand it if it was a rally on second amendment rights, but it wasn't. I might be able to understand it if it was just one guy, but it wasn't. This is a concerted effort to intimidate and deflect the attention away from the real focus. They don't even care if they look like fools... They don't really care about the gun issue. At least they get the focus off what's important.

It constantly amazes me that these people can change their sense of what's right and wrong so easily, sometimes from sentence to sentence. These people who are so happy about the 'gun show-offs' at the town hall meetings are the same ones who saw nothing wrong with the last president being shielded from folks wearing tee shirts with writing on them! Now they see nothing wrong with GUNS around the President? What bothers me most is not that one of these clowns would actually shoot at the president (although I don't doubt that a couple of these hammeheads entertained the idea), but that while the Secret Service is watching THEM, they're not able to watch someone else. Someone who's got a bone to pick with ALL of us.

And then there are those geniuses who write to their congressmen and senators saying, "I don't want socialism! The government never does anything right! Don't let them put me on a state-run plan! Oh, and they better not mess with my Social Security and Medicare!"

Does anyone else see anything quirky in that?

Well, that's it for this time around, folks. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - PS3 Price Cut by \$100!
..... Players Face Real Weather!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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PS3 Price Cut by \$100; Slimmer Model To Come

After months of rumors and anticipation, Sony Corp. is slashing the price of the PlayStation 3 by \$100 in hopes of boosting sales of the console ahead of the important holiday season.

Sony Corp. said Tuesday it will cut the price of the currently available 80 gigabyte PlayStation 3 effective immediately, to \$299. It is also launching a slimmer, lighter model with a 120 GB hard drive in early September; that version will also cost \$299.

Sony also cut the price of its existing 160 GB PlayStation 3 by \$100, to \$399. All price cuts apply worldwide.

Sales of the PlayStation 3, which launched in 2006 and cost as much as \$600 at the time, have fallen behind rival consoles. Last week, market researcher NPD Group said U.S. retail stores sold about 122,000 units of the console in July, compared with nearly 203,000 for Microsoft Corp.'s Xbox 360 and more than 252,000 for the Nintendo Co.'s Wii.

Video game software makers hope Sony's price cut will boost game sales ahead of the holidays. So far this year, the industry has suffered from weak sales because of the recession and lackluster game release schedules, which have kept consumers waiting to spend money on new titles.

Jack Tretton, president and CEO of Sony Computer Entertainment of America, said there is no question the consumer reaction to the cuts will be "phenomenal."

Customers, he said in an interview, "absolutely believe that it's the technologically superior device. (They) absolutely want one but have had trouble justifying the price."

The Wii has cost \$250 since its 2006 launch, while Xbox 360 prices, following a series of reductions, range from \$200 for a simple version with no hard drive to \$400 for the "Elite" version that comes bundled with games. The basic PS3 model remains more expensive than the cheapest versions of its counterparts.

Console sales for the rest of the year will have to be strong, if not phenomenal, for the video game industry to end 2009 on a high note. Year-to-date, overall sales are down 14 percent in the U.S., according to the NPD Group.

Still, analysts anticipate the business will pick up for the holidays,

because many hit game launches are planned for the fall.

The PlayStation price cut will also help, as would cuts from the other console makers. Analysts also expect Nintendo to bring down the price of the Wii, though it might be in the way of keeping the price tag at \$250 but throwing in more free games.

Tretton compared the spring and summer to the NFL preseason when it comes to video game sales, in that "no one pays attention and no one keeps score."

John Riccitiello, the CEO of video game publisher Electronic Arts Inc., called Sony's decision a "bold move done precisely at the right time."

He praised Sony for not waiting to make the announcement until right before Christmas or Thanksgiving, when, especially in a tough economic environment, consumers will likely be bombarded with an onslaught of messages from companies selling everything from DVDs to TVs to cell phones.

Doing the price cut in the middle of August instead, "really stands out," he said in an interview. He added the price cuts will be a boost not only to Sony, but to the industry and software publishers like EA as well.

EA recently launched "Madden NFL 10," the latest installment of its wildly popular football franchise.

The PlayStation 3 price cut has been highly anticipated. On Tuesday morning, at least two retailers - Sears and Kmart - seemed to jump the gun on Sony and posted the new prices on their Web sites.

Sony did not cut the price of its handheld gaming system, the PlayStation Portable. It did, however, announce it is adding a digital reader service that will allow PSP owners to download comics - including content from Marvel Entertainment's Spider-Man, X-Men and the Fantastic Four - beginning in December.

Nintendo Co. had no comment on Sony's announcement. The company says it has no plans for price cuts at the moment.

A representative for Microsoft Corp.'s Xbox division did not immediately respond to a message seeking comment.

Players Face Real Weather in New Sports Video Games

If it's raining outside or hurricane season is in full swing, it won't just be real-life sports affected but also sports video games with real-time weather starting to impact virtual players.

With game publishers just about perfecting ground visuals in games, the next step to boost realism is to replicate the actual weather, be it at a football stadium or on a golf course, which impacts how virtual players perform and how the game looks.

EA Sports has partnered with The Weather Channel to introduce real-time weather into its "Madden NFL 10" football videogame so if a hurricane

hits the United States, gamers will also find certain stadiums more challenging to play.

"Tropical systems typically bring with them strong winds and heavy rain, so hurricanes on a path closer to a stadium would certainly affect gameplay, creating a wet field, wind gusts and more," said Tom Moore, lead meteorologist at The Weather Channel. Broadband-connected consoles like Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 allow the new "Madden" game to get constant weather updates.

"Our teams at The Weather Channel provide a data feed that allows EA to pull real-time weather for any location chosen as a venue within the game," said Derek Van Nostran, director of marketing for The Weather Channel Interactive.

"We also provided historical data for the past three years so that the EA producers would be able to match realistic weather conditions at every venue for games played at any time of year."

From a gaming perspective, players will see their virtual NFL stars drop more passes, fumble more balls and slip and slide in the gale force winds and rain associated with a hurricane or tropical storm.

"We basically have the traditional weather conditions covered," said Phil Frazier, senior producer of "Madden NFL 10" at EA Tiburon.

"We even support extreme heat and cold, where extreme heat has a huge impact on how quickly players fatigue as you play the game."

Frazier said weather conditions have a visual affect on the game as well.

Rain and snow games have a much different feel because of lighting tweaks and added fog effects while snow games feel cooler because of an added blue tint to the lighting.

Subtle lighting adjustments in rainy games make the game feel more dirty and the players' uniforms will get muddy if they're playing on grass fields.

College football fans will also experience real-time weather in EA Sports' "NCAA Football 10," which includes snow and rain.

The game's designer, Ben Haumiller, said bad weather will cause wide receivers to slip while running their routes and winds can impact everything from long kicks to field goals.

While football is a sport known for being played in any type of weather, the PGA TOUR stops play during rain but EA Sports' "Tiger Woods PGA TOUR 10" allows gamers to play through virtual rain and wind storms that not even the pros would tackle.

"At one point during development there was some really extreme tropical weather hitting northern Florida," said Mike Cayado, supervising producer for "Tiger Woods PGA TOUR 10" at EA Tiburon.

"When we entered the game onto the TPC Sawgrass course, we were playing in 30-40 mph winds. That has never been experienced before inside our game."

Outside of the visual impact of the game's authentic courses, when the

grass gets wet the ball sticks and doesn't roll as much.

"As a player you have to be making constant adjustments to these changing conditions and it really adds a lot of depth to the gameplay," said Cayado.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Oracle: Justice Dept OK's Sun Deal

Business software maker Oracle Corp. said Thursday it has received the Justice Department's approval to move forward with its \$7.4 billion acquisition of former dot-com-era star Sun Microsystems Inc.

The deal still needs to get the go-ahead from the European Commission.

Clearance by the Justice Department had been held up over questions about the licensing of Java, a programming language that Sun invented that now runs on more than 7 billion electronic devices around the world, including cell phones and personal computers.

Sun's shareholders approved the deal in July.

Another potential antitrust question could surround Sun's MySQL database, an open-source product. Some worry Oracle could make MySQL a lower priority as it tries to boost sales of its market-leading database software.

Sun's performance had been shaky for nearly a decade before Oracle outbid IBM Corp. for the Santa Clara, Calif.-based company in April. IBM is one of Oracle's biggest database software rivals, and is a major Sun rival in computer servers.

The Sun acquisition will give Oracle more control over the development of Java, a key technology used in its products, and also thrust the Redwood Shores, Calif.-based company into hardware, a new area for Oracle.

The Justice Department's approval was expected.

Apple Accuses Psystar of Destroying Evidence

The ongoing battle between Apple and Mac clone maker Psystar continued last week with Apple accusing the company of destroying evidence - and Psystar gearing up to depose nine of Apple's top executives.

"Psystar has destroyed relevant evidence that it was legally required

to preserve," Apple wrote in an Aug. 10 filing made public on Friday. Psystar "erased infringing versions of the software code used on computers sold to its customers."

Sections of the document that discuss the exact source code in question have been blacked out. But Apple said that Psystar argued that it was under no obligation to save source code modifications, even though federal rules require litigants to do so.

In July 2008, Apple sued Psystar in a Northern California District Court for eight claims of copyright infringement, breach of contract, trademark and trade infringement, and unfair competition after Psystar started selling a computer that uses an unauthorized, modified version of Apple's OS X.

Psystar filed a countersuit the following month which argued that Apple's legal and technical maneuvers were preventing a market for third-party Mac clones. In February, Judge William Alsup ruled that Psystar could switch up its strategy against Apple and accuse the company of copyright misuse instead of antitrust violations.

In the filing from last week, Apple said it discovered that the source code was missing in March 2009. Before the two companies could meet about the deletions, however, Psystar filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection. The two sides finally met on July 23, 2009.

Among the details that were revealed in the filing, Psystar claimed that its customer support system, provided by SupportSuite, randomly loses or deletes e-mail. Psystar, however, has not yet provided Apple with any evidence that it contacted SupportSuite customer service with any complaints about these deletions.

Apple wants the court to force Psystar to produce the missing code. If they don't, Apple wants Psystar to admit that they destroyed the code, and wants the court to sanction Psystar for discovery misconduct.

Psystar is apparently not too worried about the source code snafu. In a Thursday blog post, Psystar was much more interested in upcoming depositions of Apple executives.

"We are pleased to announce that an agreement with Apple's counsel was reached earlier this month and we now have the final list of their deponents for our proposed topics with respect to this litigation," Psystar wrote in a blog post titled "A taste of their own medicine."

Psystar said it planned to make these depositions an inclusive event. "We're taking the top ten most highly moderated questions [from the Psystar forums] for each person to be asked at their depositions," the post said.

Between Aug. 7 and Aug. 21, Psystar will be questioning nine Apple executives. According to the published schedule, the company has already grilled John Wright, Apple's senior software manager for OS X, Kevin Van Vechten, software engineer manager for OS X, Phil Schiller, senior vice president of worldwide product marketing for Apple, and Mike Culbert, senior director for Mac hardware.

Still set to be interviewed are engineers Gary Thomas and Greg Christie, Simon Patience, head of core OS for OS X, Mark Donnelly, vice president of finance and worldwide business management, and Bob Mansfield, senior

vice president of Mac hardware engineering.

"Bear in mind that we might not be able to release the answers to said questions until the conclusion of this litigation, but we are still allowed to use them amongst our legal counsel and in court," Psystar wrote.

The trial has been set for January 11, 2010 in San Francisco.

Microsoft Files To Stay Word Injunction

Microsoft Corp said on Tuesday it filed a motion to stay an injunction imposed by a federal court last week which threatened to halt sales of some versions of its popular Word application.

In a filing with the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit, Microsoft also asked for an expedited review of its appeal against the ruling, which determined that Microsoft was in breach of a patent held by a small Canadian software firm.

On August 12, a U.S. district court in Texas ruled in favor of i4i Ltd in its long-running patent dispute against Microsoft, slapping more than \$290 million in damages on Microsoft and issuing an injunction preventing the world's top software company from selling versions of Word that contain the disputed patent technology.

The patent in question relates to the use of XML, or extensible markup language, in the 2003 and 2007 versions of Word. The injunction is set to take effect in 60 days from the ruling.

"These filings are not unusual in patent cases," said Microsoft spokesman Kevin Kutz on Tuesday, referring to the motion to stay and request for an expedited appeal process. "We believe the evidence clearly demonstrates that we do not infringe and that the i4i patent is invalid."

U.S. Building Tech Tools To Foil Online Censors

The US agency behind Voice of America said Friday it is working on ways to slip news past tough Internet blockades in countries such as China and Iran.

The Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) confirmed that it is crafting "feed over email" software capable of turning popular Web-based email services such as Gmail, Yahoo! Mail, or Hotmail into conduits for online news.

"It is very powerful, but not ready for beta testing," the agency's director of technology Ken Berman told AFP.

"We are not there yet; this is just a cool thing we are working on."

FOE software is intended to take advantage of encryption technology in free Web-based email services to create secure channels for news found

anywhere on the Internet, according to Berman.

"Some countries block the news. My team tries to offer tools to defeat that censorship on the Internet."

When FOE is ready, it will be beta tested in China and Iran, according to the BBG.

"China is the benchmark, the gold standard, of Internet censorship," Berman said. "We try things. The idea is to extend freedom of the Internet; freedom of the press, freedom of inquiry to those that want to know more."

A BBG engineer demonstrated FOE technology to large audience of software experts at the annual DefCon gathering of hackers in Las Vegas about two weeks ago.

"It's not a covert program," Berman said. "Everything we do is in the open, unclassified. We are a broadcast agency."

BBG handles the US government's non-military broadcasting, including Radio Free Europe, Radio Free Asia, Voice of America, and the Middle East Broadcasting Networks.

BBG reports that its broadcasters distribute programming in 60 languages to an estimated weekly audience of 175 million people via radio, TV, the Internet and other new media.

Facebook To Face Off with New Web Rivals

Facebook's vision of becoming a "utility" that offers activities to keep people online for hours could set it on a collision course with the Web's giants.

In recent days, the No.1 social networking company revamped its search engine and bought a start-up that some call a rival to hot micro-blogging service Twitter. It is also testing a stripped-down version of its service to boost growth overseas and is developing an electronic payments system.

These moves mark a new phase in Facebook's evolution as the five-year-old company meshes the viral power of social networks and its huge member base to barge into new markets.

"When you become the site that people spend enough hours on everyday it's very natural to take advantage of that and to become the site that tries to provide all the services that portals provide," said Haim Mendelson, a professor at Stanford University's Graduate School of Business.

The site, co-founded by 25-year-old Mark Zuckerberg in a Harvard University dorm room, could challenge Web portals like Yahoo Inc and Google in content and communications, Brigrantine Advisors analyst Colin Gillis said.

Facebook, which Zuckerberg has described as a "social utility," could take on eBay Inc's PayPal online payments system and maybe Apple Inc's

iTunes for digital downloads, he added.

"People only do so many things on the Web," said Jeffrey Rayport, founder of digital media consultancy firm Marketspace. "There are a lot of companies that would like to own that set of activities."

With more than 250 million members, Facebook was the world's fourth most visited website in June, according to comScore. It is on track to bring in more than \$500 million in revenue this year, most of it from advertising sales.

The new initiatives represent the natural evolution of the service, said Facebook Vice President of Product Christopher Cox. He downplayed the increasing overlap between Facebook's new search engine and Twitter's search engine, or Google's dominant Web search engine.

Facebook's previous search engine was useful for finding other people on the site, but the new version lets users look up what others are saying about particular topics, from healthcare to Iran. The search results are relevant to each person, Cox said in an interview.

"When you're trying to figure out what to eat, or what shoes to buy, or who to vote for, you don't go ask thousands of strangers," said Cox. "The Web should reflect that."

Facebook's recent acquisition of FriendFeed, which lets people share and search for content in real time across social networks and blogs, gives it another key asset as it seeks to perhaps extend its search scope beyond the site's boundaries.

Google recently unveiled new search engine prototype, dubbed Caffeine, that promises faster, more relevant searches.

Asked about Facebook's search efforts, a Google spokesman said, "We have many competitors, and we take them all seriously. But what we take more seriously is innovation and making search better."

Facebook is likely not interested in going head-to-head in Internet search with Google, Stanford's Mendelson said. But the areas of overlap between the companies are increasing, and by beefing up search, Facebook could become more competitive with Google, he added.

At the same time, Facebook could go after PayPal with the online payments system it is developing. Companies like 1-800-Flowers have already set up shop within Facebook, and e-commerce could become more popular on the site.

Software developers who sell applications on Facebook are testing the payments system, Cox said, but it is not clear whether it will handle e-commerce transactions across the Web.

"We're really just trying to get our bearings on what the right product is here with a handful of people at this point," said Cox.

Symantec Lists "Dirtiest Web Sites"

Symantec has unveiled a list of 100 "worst of the worst" websites,

nearly half of which used porn to lure people to pages booby trapped with viruses.

The US computer security titan's list of "Dirtiest Web Sites" discovered in recent months included names such as firstsexyteen, schoolbad, and cheatsarchive.

Videogame players sometimes search online for "cheats," software secrets that let them change game play.

While 48 percent of the websites on the list featured adult content, the remaining tainted online locales ran a gamut of topics including deer hunting, catering, figure skating, legal services, and retail electronics.

People visiting the websites face risks of having their computers infected with malicious software that could mine personal data or give cybercriminals control of machines, according to Symantec.

"There has been exponential growth in the number of online threats that are constantly evolving as cybercriminals look for new ways to target your money, identity or assets," said Symantec consumer business unit senior vice president Rowan Trollope on Thursday.

"Armed with this information, consumers are empowered to make informed decisions about which sites to visit."

Websites that made Symantec's "dirtiest" list were crammed with "staggering" numbers of virus threats, according to Trollope.

Chinese 'Tomato Garden' Software Pirates Get Jail Terms

A Chinese court has sentenced four people to jail for pirating Microsoft's Windows XP operating system, China's state-owned media reported on Friday.

The four people were convicted of copyright infringement on Thursday for selling a modified version of Windows XP, called Tomato Garden, which was downloaded by 10 million people, the Shanghai Daily newspaper reported on its Web site.

Tomato Garden stripped out anti-piracy protections built into Windows XP, it said.

The heaviest penalties in the case were levied against Hong Lei, the chief developer and distributor of the software, and Sun Xiansheng, who managed the online marketing efforts for Tomato Garden, the report said. Both were given three and a half year sentences and a 1 million (US\$146,150) yuan fine.

Two others - Liang Chaoyong and Zhang Tianping - were given two-year sentences and fined 100,000 yuan.

Chengdu Share Software Net Science and Technology, the company that operated the Tomato Garden Web site, was also convicted in the case. The court confiscated earnings of 2.9 million yuan from the company and fined it an additional 8.7 million yuan - equal to three times the amount it earned from sales of the software, consulting company

Marbridge Research said, citing a local media report. The verdict was a "timely warning to counterfeiters of software products including Windows 7," Microsoft said in a statement.

"Microsoft applauds the efforts of government enforcement agencies and the court," it said. "Microsoft will continue to cooperate closely with the Chinese government and local industry partners to promote respect for intellectual property rights."

Pirated Microsoft software is widely used in homes and offices across China and can be bought at many electronics bazaars. A pirated version of Windows 7 was already on sale at a Beijing bazaar last month for around \$5, though the operating system is not slated for release until Oct. 22. A cracked version of the OS also appeared online in recent weeks after a Windows system image and a product key were stolen from Lenovo, China's biggest PC maker, and placed on a Chinese hacker forum.

Court Shuts Down Sites Promising Free Government Grants

A U.S. district court has shut down several Web sites that falsely promised they could help consumers get free government grants, the U.S. Federal Trade Commission announced.

The Web sites advertised an "easy to use" program called Grant Connect that supposedly would help people "instantly find the grant that's right" for them. The sites used pictures of U.S. President Barack Obama, Vice President Joe Biden and the American flag to give the false impression that they were connected to the government, the FTC said.

The FTC charged the companies with using bogus testimonials, failing to disclose the actual cost of their products, bundling multiple products together for sale without adequate disclosures and debiting consumers' bank accounts on a recurring basis without permission.

Instead of connecting customers to government grants, the Web sites provide "outdated, useless" information and "worthless" grant-writing tools, the FTC said. Few grants are available to consumers who sign up for the program, and those that are available require applicants to meet strict eligibility requirements, the agency said.

The U.S. District Court for the District of Nevada issued a temporary restraining order July 28. Since then, five of the 12 defendants in the case agreed to a preliminary injunction halting these practices until the matter is decided at trial, the FTC said.

The court has scheduled a preliminary injunction hearing for the remaining defendants for Sept. 11. The FTC is seeking to permanently stop these practices and force the companies to return their ill-gotten gains so the funds can be used to reimburse consumers.

The Web site operators sell several products, including Grant Connect, which they describe as "a unique, consumer-friendly U.S. government grant program that delivers all of the tools for the consumer to search multiple databases, write grant proposals, and deliver polished plans." The companies said customers would be charged less than US\$3, but by bundling other products and services, such as identity theft protection services, credit offers and purported health benefits plans with their

offer, they charge customers as much as \$70 per month, the FTC said.

Using an affiliated network of Web sites, including Grantconnectoffer.com and others, the operators made claims such as, "Grant Connect - \$15 Billion of Free Money Available"; "Over \$10 Billion Issued in 2009 Already"; and "EASY TO USE PROGRAM: Instantly find the Grant that's right for you!"

The Grant Connect site features supposed testimonials, including photos of people who supposedly got grants from the company, including one that states, "It's so easy! I got my first grant for \$300,000. All I have to do is search and click."

For a time, the site featured a photo of Obama and Biden standing in front of an American flag, next to the Grant Connect logo and a caption that read, "CHANGE Is Here! \$15 BILLION in FREE Government MONEY for you!"

The Web sites contain some disclosure language about other products in small type, the FTC said. Few consumers realize they will be charged monthly for services such as "SmartHealth Gold medical and lifestyle benefits" and "VComm International and Long Distance Calling Service" unless they cancel these memberships, the FTC said.

The FTC charged the Grant Connect defendants with violating federal law by making deceptive representations regarding Grant Connect; failing to adequately disclose the material terms and conditions of their offers; and violating the U.S. Electronic Funds Transfer Act by debiting consumers' bank accounts on a recurring basis without their authorization.

The FTC complaint named the companies Grant Connect, Global Gold, Horizon Holdings, O'Connell Gray, Pink, Vantex Group and Vertek Group, as well as Rachel Cook, manager of Vantex and Vertek; James Gray, managing member of Grant Connect, Horizon Holdings and O'Connell Gray; Steven Henriksen, president and owner of Global Gold; Juliette Kimoto, owner of Vertek and general partner of Pink; and Randy O'Connell, managing member of Horizon Holdings and O'Connell Gray.

The five defendants who agreed to the preliminary injunction entered by the court on Tuesday are Grant Connect, Horizon Holdings, O'Connell Gray, James Gray and Randy O'Connell.

Cyber Junkies Can Unplug at U.S. Retreat

The first US retreat for Internet addicts has opened its doors, welcoming a teenager that was captive to World of Warcraft online role-playing videogame.

The 19-year-old boy went from pursuing quests in Azeroth to bottle-feeding baby goats and building a chicken coop as part of a reStart Internet Addiction Recovery Program at a rural five acre spread in the state of Washington.

"We are a cold turkey place; no technology," reStart psychotherapist Hilarie Cash told AFP on Thursday.

"A gamer is not going to be allowed to game any time they are here because it is the gaming that is their drug of choice."

Cash and therapist Cosette Rae opened the Internet addiction retreat in July as a live-in center for re-connecting cyber junkies with the land of the living.

"We are not anti-technology," Cash said. "It is about helping people addicted to technology get through the withdrawal and help their brains get wired back to normal and connected to the world in a positive way."

Internet and videogame addictions have been a growing problem during the past decade as technology became increasingly pervasive in people's lives, according to the psychotherapist.

"The problem is worsening," Cash said. "More kids are being raised from the earliest days with technology. If allowed to spend too much time there, their development is not balanced."

The reStart rehab program includes teaching skills such as starting conversations and reading body language.

Videogame addicts typically need to be reprogrammed to be conscientious about everyday tasks such as bathing, cooking, and household chores, according to reStart. They also need tutoring when it comes to dating.

"The typical gamer is somebody who has fallen way behind in social skills and lacks confidence," Cash said.

Videogames are designed to immerse players' in fantasy worlds and hold their attention with intermittent rewards such as new powers for characters and storyline revelations.

"Games are really designed to keep people hooked," Cash said. "Those that stay hooked are people really vulnerable for whom the world is painful or scary."

Computers and the Internet are also parent-sanctioned refuges for children eager to escape hard knocks that are usually part of growing up.

"Childhood can be difficult for anybody," Cash said. "You have lots of kids who are shy, or have miserable home lives, or low self-esteem or are struggling in school. These are all kids drawn to the safety of a screen."

Children that spend too much time in the company of computers or videogame consoles can grow into socially mal-adjusted adults, according to reStart.

The retreat has beds for six patients. A 45-day stay costs 14,500 dollars plus cash for daily expenses such as renting camping gear for wilderness adventures.

ReStart has a 12-step program, similar to those for alcohol or drug addicts, for recovering cyber junkies.

"The idea here is teaching people how to be moderate in their behavior and stay oriented to the real world," Cash said.

The center also treats Internet addicts as out-patients, with typical patients ranging from 18 to 28 years old with "extensive exposure to porn, but not much to sex."

The retreat's premier patient is being nudged back into running with the aim of reacquainting him with his body and the physical world.

He has discovered a love for animals and cares for a puppy, baby goats and chickens at the retreat.

"He is thriving, and his social skills are improving by leaps and bounds," Cash said of the retreat's first live-in patient. "He is finding himself very successful with the young women he encounters."

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